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RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 0324
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RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 4104
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3059
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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY SUPPORTIVE OF U.S. PRIORITIES
FOR NEW KARZAI GOVERNMENT

REF: STATE 118297

Classified By: Political-Military Counselor J. Liam Wasley for Reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Poloffs delivered reftel points to Italian MFA Special Envoy for Afghanistan Sergio Mercuri on November 17. Mercuri reacted favorably to the demarche, saying that it tracked closely with the approach envisaged by FM Frattini, who will attend the inauguration along with MFA Af-Pak Envoy Massimo Iannucci. Frattini is convinced of the necessity of making firm demands on Karzai even as we show public support for his new government, and believes that Italy's long familiarity with Karzai (who came to Italy frequently during the exile of King Zaher Shah as part of the Rome Process) will give it some leverage over him. Mercuri also welcomed the U.S. position that the UN should continue to lead the way on message coordination, stressing that for Italy the UN is the "empowering structure" for international action and that "undermining it would jeopardize the structure of our involvement there."

¶2. (C) Mercuri concurred with the idea of encouraging Karzai to set benchmarks for Afghan assumption of lead responsibility for security, governance and development at the district and provincial level, since it is in line with the current ANDS approach and would enable an improved dialogue between PRTs and provinces. He said Italy favors Afghan-owned benchmarks that are realistic and measurable, but without strict time limits, to which the Afghans do not respond well. Mercuri added that the Electoral Complaints Commission could serve as a valuable model for an Anti-Corruption Commission with international participation in that it was able to do its work without impinging on Afghan sovereignty. He also stressed the need to convey to the GoIRA the urgency of moving quickly to welcome and facilitate international efforts such as the European Commission's Rule of Law Mission, the deployment of which has been delayed by Afghan slowness to respond.

THORNE